

**Phil 111/504: Contemporary Moral Issues (Aggie Access)**  
**Dr. Kristi Sweet**  
**MILS 110**  
**TR 12:45-2pm**

**Contact Information:**

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Office Hours: Tuesday 2:15-4:30, and by appointment

**Required Texts:**

*Ethics in Practice*, edited by Hugh LaFollette (available at the campus bookstore)

Course Packet (available at Notes -n- Quotes)

**Course Description:**

This course will introduce students to basic concepts of moral reasoning, and work to apply those concepts to contemporary moral issues. We will examine the traditional frameworks for moral decision making, such as virtue ethics, stoicism, rule-based ethics, and utilitarianism. Each of these traditions embodies a different vision of what it means for human beings to be good, and our investigations will be guided by this question. Once we have oriented ourselves by these frameworks, we will examine such issues as those relating to family life, civil liberties, economic justice, and others.

**Course Objectives:**

Students should complete the class with an understanding of basic moral concepts and philosophical portraits of moral goodness. Students should also develop insight into how these concepts give us a richer understanding of contemporary moral debates. My hope is that students come away not only with a more sophisticated understanding of debates currently taking place in the public forum, but also come to examine their own ideas about moral goodness.

**Course Requirements:**

To foster understanding of philosophical concepts and of debates surrounding ethical issues, students will be required to write two papers and complete both mid-term and final examinations. The first paper assigned will cover the theoretical section of the course, and will require the student to engage directly with one thinker from our reading. The second paper will require the student to offer an in-depth analysis of one of the topics discussed in the second section of the course.

**Grading:**

Paper 1 (3 pages)	25%
Paper 2 (5 pages)	30%
Midterm	20%
Final	25%

**Appointments and Correspondence:**

It is my goal to help you succeed in your academic endeavors, and I am therefore more than willing to meet with you outside of scheduled office hours to accommodate your schedule. To set up an appointment, you may see me before or after class, stop by my office, call, or email. If you choose to email me (for any reason), I will expect that your email be professional and courteous in tone and structure, and I will do the same.

**Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Policy Statement:**

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal discrimination statute that provides comprehensive civil rights protection for persons with disabilities. Among other things, this legislation requires that all students with disabilities be guaranteed a learning environment that provides for reasonable accommodation of their disabilities. If you believe you have a disability requiring an accommodation, please contact the Department of Student Life, Services for Students with Disabilities, in Cain Hall or call 845-1637.

**Academic Integrity Statements: Aggie Honor Code:**

“An Aggie does not lie, cheat, or steal, or tolerate those who do.”

Upon accepting admission to Texas A&M University, a student immediately assumes a commitment to uphold the Honor Code, to accept responsibility for learning, and to follow the philosophy and rules of the Honor System. Students will be required to state their commitment on examinations, research papers, and other academic work. Ignorance of the rules does not exclude any member of the TAMU community from the requirements or the processes of the Honor System. For additional information, please visit: <http://www.tamu.edu/aggiehonor/>

Plagiarism and/or cheating in this class will not be accepted, and will result in failure of the course. This includes plagiarism that is unintentional or results from ignorance regarding proper citation practices. If you are unsure about what constitutes acceptable citation practices, please consult with the writing center or library resources on writing styles.

## Course Assignments

### Selections are to be read for the class date listed

(These are subject to change as the semester progresses. Changes will be announced in class and will be reflected through updates to the online syllabus.)

CP refers to your readings in our Course Packet, and EP refers to readings in our Ethics in Practice textbook.

<b>Section One: Frameworks for Moral Decision Making</b>		
<i>Virtue Ethics and Stoicism</i>		
1/17	Plato, "Apology"	CP 79-104
1/22	Plato, "Apology" and <i>Republic</i>	CP 79-104; 681-688
1/24	Aristotle, <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i>	CP 935-954
1/29	Aristotle, <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i>	CP 954-963
1/31	Aristotle, <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> Epictetus, <i>The Manual of Epictetus</i>	CP 954-963 CP 468-476
2/5	Epictetus, <i>The Manual of Epictetus</i>	CP 476-484
<i>Duty-based ethics</i>		
2/7	Kant, <i>Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals</i>	CP 49-57
2/12	Kant, <i>Groundwork</i>	CP 73-5, 78-90
<i>Utilitarianism</i>		
2/14	Mill, <i>Utilitarianism</i>	CP 205-214
2/19	Mill, <i>Utilitarianism</i> Lecture on how to write a philosophy paper, and distribution of paper topics	CP 214-226
<i>Existentialism</i>		
2/21	Sartre, <i>Existentialism is a Humanism</i>	CP 345-369
2/26	Sartre, <i>Existentialism is a Humanism</i>	CP 345-369
2/28	Mid-term exam	
<b>Section Two: Ethics in Practice</b>		
<i>Life and Death</i>		
3/4	Euthanasia: Beauchamp	EP 72-79
3/6	Euthanasia: Velleman First Paper Due	EP 81-89
3/11	Spring Break	
3/13	Spring Break	
3/18	Animals: Singer; Fox	EP 171-180; 181-190
<i>The Personal Life</i>		
3/20	Family: English; Rachels	EP 218-221; 222-231
3/25	Sexuality: Punzo; Goldman	EP 277-281; 282-289
3/27	Sexuality: Marriage	Handout
<i>Liberty and Equality</i>		
4/1	Paternalism and Risk: Wilson; Husak	EP 330-334; 335-344
4/3	Free Speech: Brison; Altman	EP 377-385; 387-396
<i>Justice</i>		
4/8	Punishment: Rachels; Wright	EP 510-518; 531-541

4/10	Punishment: Pojman; Reiman	EP 544-552; 554-560
4/15	World Hunger: Singer	EP 613-622
4/17	World Hunger: Arthur	EP 602-609
4/22	Cyber Ethics	Handout
4/24	Final Paper Due, Review for Final	
5/7	Final Exam 8-10am	

## **Contemporary Moral Issues**

### Paper Topics

Due Oct. 12, 2007 (in class)

Choose ONE of the following topics for your midterm paper.

Why does Aristotle emphasize the harmonious relation of the parts of the soul? To answer this, you must discuss the parts of the soul, Aristotle's notion of virtue and the importance of pleasure in relation to our character.

Epictetus believes that happiness is possible, even in times of crisis, as long as one "keeps watch and guard" over oneself. What does he mean by this, and how will this contribute to happiness?

Kant claims that the only thing that is unconditionally good is the good will. What does the good will look like for Kant? To answer this, you must address the concept of duty—its form, and what it is we have a duty to.

Contrast the views of Kant and Mill regarding the relation between goodness and happiness. What is the main difference between what they each state the criteria of goodness is? What is the basis for this difference?

## Contemporary Moral Issues Midterm/Final paper guidelines

1. Length- Your response should be 3 (Midterm) or 5 (Final) pages in length.
2. Format- No cover pages or plastic covers, please. All pertinent information should be located at the top of the first page. Paper should be done in Times New Roman, 12 font, double-spaced, with one inch margins. You must include a bibliography. Also, feel free to use recycled paper (i.e., paper whose other side has writing or text on it).
3. Criteria for grading- The paper questions are deliberately narrow. They are structured this way in order to get you to think about a specific way into the text. You will be graded on how well you answer this question, and how well you situate the answer in relation to the broader philosophy at issue (which you will necessarily have to do in order to give an adequate account). You should demonstrate that you have read the text well, understood it, and can explain a key aspect of it in your own language. Do not simply recount your lecture notes, but formulate the arguments and ideas in your own voice.
4. Thesis- You **MUST** have a thesis statement. For this paper, your thesis statement should be a clear idea expressing an interpretation of the text that you are going to “defend,” that is, explain based on textual analysis.
5. Use of text- You must cite the text, though not to the extent that it outweighs your analysis of it. You should choose quotes that illustrate directly what you are trying to highlight, and be sure to show how and why the quote chosen does so. Do not indent quotes less than 5 lines in length. Part of the assignment is to demonstrate that you can engage with the text thoughtfully; **if you do not cite the text**, I will assume you did not read. Your grade will reflect this. Further, you should not use outside or secondary sources. The task of these papers is to measure how well you understand and can interpret the text, not how well you summarize another person’s view on the text.
6. Citation- Be sure to properly cite your quotes. You may use whatever method with which you are most comfortable (parenthetical, footnotes, endnotes, and whichever style—APA, Chicago).
7. Grammar, etc. - Your papers should be proofread, spell-checked, stapled, etc. If there are too many technical errors of this variety, I will return the paper to you and ask you to resubmit it.
8. **I am willing to accept drafts of all of your written assignments, and will give you feedback regarding the direction and content of your paper.** If you wish for me to read your paper ahead of time, you may come by my office during office hours, or set up an appointment at your convenience.
9. If you have problems writing, I highly suggest that you utilize the **writing center** on campus for guidance in formulating the structure and argument of your work.

10. Late paper policy- As both of these papers are scheduled at times that coincide with mid- and end of term grading, you may not receive an extension on these papers. Each *day* that the paper is late, you will be marked down one half of a grade.

## **Final Paper Assignment**

Contemporary Moral Issues

Paper Due 12/3

Length: 5 pages

The goal of your final paper will be to explore one of the moral issues treated in class. You must treat the issue chosen from the *perspective of moral goodness*, employing the following frameworks (you may choose to focus on one, or use multiple frameworks): Aristotle's notion of virtue and character, Kant's notion of duty and/or respect for autonomy, or Mill's emphasis on happiness. In your paper you should have a clear thesis that states a position on the goodness (or badness) of the specific topic of your essay. You should be sure to include in your paper the relevant pieces from our *Ethics in Practice* anthology. Also be sure to consult the paper guidelines distributed with the midterm paper assignment (available online).